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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [IR](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA CHIEF APPLIES FOR VISA, DISCUSSES IRAN
COVERAGE

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph E.LeBaron, for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

(C) KEY POINTS

-- On June 22, Al Jazeera Network Director General Wadah Khanfar applied for a U.S. visa. During an office call with Ambassador at the Embassy, Khanfar addressed the imbalance between Al Jazeera's heavy coverage of Gaza in January and its comparatively scanty coverage of Iran's elections and their aftermath.

-- Khanfar said coverage of Iran had been scanty because it is difficult for journalists to operate in Iran. He asserted that the Iranian Government "hates" Al Jazeera and does not allow its correspondents to operate freely.

End Key Points

¶1. (SBU) Al Jazeera Director General Wadah Khanfar said Al Jazeera's relationship with the Government of Iran (GOI) is "antagonistic to say the least."

¶2. (C) He said doing business in Iran is difficult for all journalists.

Al Jazeera had originally posted four international correspondents and two permanent correspondents to Iran. However, the Iranian government asked one of Al Jazeera's correspondents assigned to cover the pre-election atmosphere to stop filming. An Iranian government representative phoned Khanfar and threatened that Al Jazeera's journalists would be asked to leave the country if they continued to film.

¶3. (C) Khanfar said he gave his journalists permission to continue filming for 18 hours. Shortly before the start of the elections, according to Khanfar, the cameras of all four temporary correspondents were confiscated, and Iran forced them to leave the country. Al Jazeera's two permanent correspondents remain under constant watch by the government of Iran and do not have the same capacity to report now as they did before the demonstrations.

¶4. (C) Khanfar said there were "technical" reasons at play in Iran which were not an issue in Gaza, thus the difference in coverage. For example, there is no satellite news gathering cooperation in Iran; journalists there have to smuggle in cell phone and camera equipment that usually gets confiscated by Iranian authorities.

¶5. (C) Doing business in Iran is a constant "fight," Khanfar said. It involves a lot of "shouting" to sway the Iranian authorities. Gaza, on the other hand, could be covered in totality owing to the ease of cooperation with other satellite news agencies. Khanfar added that journalists could move freely in Gaza, which was not the case in Iran owing to Iranian intelligence's surveillance of journalists from arrival to departure. Had it not been for Twitter, said Khanfar, the majority of news on the Iranian elections would not have reached Al Jazeera.

¶6. (C) Khanfar believed that Iranian officials "hate" Al Jazeera because of Al Jazeera's coverage of Iraq. In Khanfar,s view, Iran believes that Al Jazeera was a propaganda machine for Sunni Iraqis during the Iraq war and was biased against the Iraqi Shias supported by Iran. Khanfar went on to say that no Arab journalists at Al Jazeera like Iran. On the contrary, they have strong sentiments against Iran.

¶7. (C) Khanfar acknowledged that, compared to Gaza, the coverage of Iran,s elections was scanty, but he emphasized that Gaza, unlike Iran, was in war, which was not comparable to elections. He further stressed that Al Jazeera's three flagship talk shows all dedicated broadcasts to discussion of the Iranian elections, and that the amount of discussion and analysis on Al Jazeera outstripped that of Al Jazeera,s Arabic language competitors, including Al Arabiya.

LeBaron